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ABSTRACT

A meta-goal of organization development is that of helping participants establish appreciation for and skill in using objective data about themselves. The prominent method for soliciting and sharing such data has been survey feedback. An Organizational Development (OD) consultant should have at least three skills in order to use survey feedback effectively. First, he should be adept at collecting relevant, valid data and at putting the data into a form for feedback that is understandable by and energizing to the participants. Second, he should be able to raise the mundane data to a level of larger, essential significance, making the data worthy of notice by the participants. Third, the consultant should find ways of incorporating survey feedback into the natural ebb and flow of OD training. This paper discusses each of these three capabilities. Further, it illustrates ways in which questionnaires, interviews, and observations can be employed at five stages of OD training. Survey feedback can thus take its place as an integral and natural part of a larger macrodesign for organizational development in schools. (Author)

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A
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INCORPORATING SURVEY FEEDBACK IN OD INTERVENTIONS

Richard A. Schmuck
January 1973

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Incorporating Survey Feedback in OD Interventions

by

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for a symposium entitled,

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Incorporating Survey Feedback in OD Interventions

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OD theoreticians usually concur that some form of data feedback constitutes an integral part of a standard organizational intervention. Argyris (1970) for one has suggested that one of the three primary tasks of an interventionist is to help a client organization obtain and use valid information about itself. Argyris says that the consultant should help clients to diagnose "the factors, plus their interrelationships, that create problems" and goes on to argue that such diagnostic data should be presented in a way that makes problem-solving and adaptive actions possible.

A paraphrase of Bennis's article on the "Goals and Meta-Goals of Laboratory Training" (1962) reads similarly. Among the values that "transcend and shape the articulated goals" of any particular OD training event -- which Bennis calls meta-goals -- he writes that the organization must be helped to expand its alternatives and possible routes for action by taking a careful look at its own group processes. In Bennis's terms, one value of laboratory training should be "expanded consciousness and recognition of choice."

In a book that Matt Miles and I had published a year and a half ago (1971), we argued that "the systematic collection of information, which is then reported back to appropriate organizational units as a base for diagnosis, problem-solving, and planning" is one of the most important

modes of intervention for OD projects in schools.

Despite the agreed upon importance of the collection and feedback of data to client organizations, the actual use of these methods presents a major challenge to most OD consultants. Think of the skills that are required! The OD consultant first must be clever about collecting relevant data -- let alone valid data -- and must put the information in a form for feedback that is understandable, and yet engaging, stimulating, and tension-producing. Second, he should communicate much more with the data than simply mundane facts. The data should be raised to a level of essential significance, making them worthy of notice by the organizational participants. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the OD consultant should be able to introduce data at opportune times into the ongoing, contemporary ebb and flow of organizational life. The more naturally and spontaneously he can do this, the more helpful he will be.

On the first point -- the OD consultant's perceptiveness and cleverness about amassing relevant data -- I have often marveled at how brilliant novelists such as Zola, Lawrence, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway describe the behaviors of persons with such detail and clarity. These writers' abilities for making perceptive observations and for transforming them into word-pictures are to be envied by most scientifically trained organizational consultants. Take Joyce's Ullysses as an excellent example! The entire novel, which is longer than most basic texts in psychology, describes the events of just one day and then mostly the experiences of a very few characters. At one point, Joyce uses over three pages just to describe Leopold Bloom eating his typical breakfast of pork kidney, bread, butter, and tea.

Yet, beyond this detail, this perceptiveness, and this concentration lies a more significant contribution of Joyce and other geniuses of fiction. They establish a sense of principles and hypotheses that go beyond and are more general than the lives of their characters. They do what Getzels and Thelen might describe as creating a nomethetic net out of idiographic details. Herein lies the second basic challenge for the OD consultant who sets out to make his data useful and motivating to clients. He must overcome the scientific myopia for distant, abstract, and general phenomena. He must view particular events as being connected, infer their relationships, and induce from these events some impressions of more universal aspects that the client organization depicts. It is as though he were an anthropologist who, while preparing a detailed case study, is also attempting to establish some general principles. The OD consultant's task should be to help his clients solve their unique problems while at the same time helping them to recognize that in many ways they are like all of mankind or at least like all of "organization-kind."

Although these novelists were effective in bringing their observations to paper, biographers have pointed out how ineffective they were in using their understanding and precise perceptions within their own lives. Both Fitzgerald and Hemingway, for instance, often seem to have been oblivious to the impact of their own behavior on others in their presence. They lacked insight into what existential psychologists call the "living present" and what OD consultants refer to as the "here and now." Without respect for the here and now, the OD consultant will lack the skill of introducing his data with appropriate timing. He must not

only be perceptive, insightful, and able to derive universal principles from particular events, but also he must be direct, confrontative, and supportive at the proper times.

To develop the skill of amassing valid and useful data, the OD consultant should collect data continuously and perpetually. Even though self-report questionnaires, interview schedules, and observation categories are the primary formal methods for survey feedback, the consultant, turned novelist temporarily, will keep in mind that organizational memos and letters, informal conversations with organizational members, and observations made throughout even a casual visit to the organization also offer very important information about the organization. At the same time, the OD consultant should also remember that collections of formal data can strengthen organizational members' views of the validity and the legitimacy of survey feedback. Ideally, the OD consultant will let his first impressions, however obtained, guide the selection of formal questionnaires, interviews, and observations; the results of which are embellished in turn by further insights gained from more informally collected data. Both formal and informal means of collecting data are necessary for gaining insights into the operation of the organization.

The following principles for formal data collection and feedback are helpful guidelines for the OD consultant.

First, the consultant should interview clients prior to collecting data via questionnaires. Interviewing helps to establish rapport and trust between the clients and consultant. Such interpersonal norms, in turn, support more authentic responses by clients on self-report questionnaires.

Second, when using an interview or a questionnaire, the consultant should ask general questions before specific ones. Pointing to specific issues first often puts new ideas into the clients' minds about how to answer the more general questions. In this way, the consultant puts words into the client's mouth.

Third, during the interview, the consultant should model the communication skills of paraphrasing, describing behaviors objectively, checking impressions of the client's feelings, and describing his own feelings when appropriate. Such modeling will facilitate the introduction of those same skills later during a training session.

Fourth, when using questionnaires, the consultant should collect some data that can be easily quantified and other data that render quotable phrases. For as many clients who prefer numbers, there seem to be an equal number who are captivated by the catchy phrases of their compatriots. Ideally, the numbers and the phrases will support similar themes.

Fifth, over the full term of a sustained OD intervention, the consultant should employ the very same open-ended questionnaire item several times in order to engage participants in discussions about how things are changing within the organization. For example, force-field analyses of the very same phenomena might be drawn several months in succession.

Sixth, the consultant should not use elaborate observation systems for purposes of survey feedback. Ten categories are plenty; it is better to use even fewer and to keep the tallying process simple. Client arguments over an ambiguous instrument typically siphon off energy

and motivation better used for self-analysis.

Seventh, after formally observing a meeting, the consultant should interview a few of the participants after the meeting about what events were typical and atypical in the meeting. Such interviews will help the consultant to understand how interaction typically transpires at the group's meetings.

Eighth, the consultant should carefully sift the data before presenting it; give only small amounts at one time, and try to elicit client discussion about meaning of the data for the organization.

Ninth, and finally, the consultant should make observations of the client group while the group discusses meanings of the data and use such observations to encourage a process analysis of the client's own interactions during the survey feedback. The consultant should ask how typical these interactions are!

Along with these nine principles for increasing the validity and the usefulness of survey feedback, there also are several ways to give the particular items of the survey more profound significance for organizational participants.

First, and foremost, the survey feedback activity should always be guided by a simple theory -- a theory that obviously generalizes to other social settings, such as the family. For example, the concept of "gunnysacking" is applicable to most interpersonal relationships that become close. Gunnysacking is an accumulation of unexpressed frustrations and irritations. Gunnysacked emotions tend to lead to ineffective collaboration because of a building-up of interpersonal tension. Such destructive tension can be avoided by talking directly and openly before

the gunnysack becomes too weighty. Such a simple theory is a clear, reasonable, and thoroughly acceptable point of view, especially when it is also pointed out that interpersonal irritations are virtually inevitable and that some conflict is characteristic of all organizations -- think of your own family! A simple theory such as this one can be used to emphasize the significance of exposing frustrations and irritations on the job -- no matter how trivial and uninteresting some of them may be -- during the survey feedback session.

Second, the data sometimes assume increased significance if the variables being measured are labeled by an important and valued summary designation. So, for example, the consultant might present data about the "five features of organizational health" or about the "three facets of climate." The organization's productivity, its morale, and its use of human resources are other useful summary designations.

Third, particular data can take on a higher degree of significance when they are compared with companion data from similar organizations. Pressures for understanding and action usually seem to be strongest when members of the client organization view themselves lying somewhere between the "worst" and the "best" of the comparison organizations.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge the OD consultant faces, beyond assuring the data's validity, usefulness, and significance, is that of incorporating survey feedback into the natural ebb and flow of OD training. There are at least two capabilities associated with integrating data feedback into the OD process. The first is having available,

both in one's head and in the files, a large and diverse collection of formal questionnaires, interview items, and observation categories. The second capability is manifested in the midst of the OD intervention; it involves an astute sense of timing and appropriateness.

On the matter of having a readily available repertoire of measurement devices, the school OD consultant can now make use of two recent volumes that house a number of relevant instruments. One is the Handbook of Organization Development in Schools (1972) that my colleagues and I at CASEA published a few months ago. Items for survey instruments are included for topics such as clarifying communication, establishing goals, uncovering and working with conflict, improving meetings, solving problems, and making decisions. The second volume deals with survey feedback in schools almost entirely; it is entitled Diagnosing Professional Climate of Schools, has been co-authored by Fox, Jung, Van Egmond, Ritvo, and me, and is due to be published very soon (1973). The contents include instruments for such topics as the school as a system, problem solving, role responsibilities, school norms, and making use of the school's human resources.

Going on to the second capability, that of an astute sense of timing, the OD consultant should remember that formal data collections and feedback sessions are not just used once during an OD intervention. The collection and feedback of data can be used appropriately at every stage of the intervention. Indeed, it is useful for a consultant to interweave methods and instruments for data collection and feedback with each of the primary stages of OD interventions. Here are five examples

of how survey feedback has been built into the natural flow of some school OD projects:

1. Obviously, the first appropriate time for survey feedback occurs during entry when data can be used to develop understanding and agreement about the objectives of the intervention. An example occurred a few years ago in our work with a large high school faculty of over 80. During the early stages of entry, we were assured by the principal first and by the department heads later that an OD project would be welcomed in the school. Together with these leaders we drew up a list of goals for the project; however, before commencing any training, we decided to interview most of the teachers for 30 minutes or so. Along with sharing the list of goals and getting teacher reactions to the list, the interviewer asked questions such as: "Thinking about your school, what do you like most about it? What do you like least about it? What do you see as the most important staff problems? How do you see your staff working together? Are decisions made by a few of by many? How often are you, yourself, influential when the staff makes decisions? Have there been discussions about OD in the school? Did you participate? What misgivings do you have about the OD project?," etc.

The diverse answers to these questions convinced us to hold several faculty meetings during which the OD project was further clarified and goals were added to the list we already had generated with the principal and department heads. Additionally, the interviews helped our consulting team establish rapport with many teachers and insight into how to design the initial week of training.

2. Another appropriate time to integrate survey feedback into the natural flow of OD is during the first major training event itself. This can be accomplished in several ways. Data previously collected, by interview, observation, or questionnaire might be fed back as part of the planned design, or data can be collected on the spot and fed back immediately. One very useful questionnaire for collecting appropriate data on the spot is the "Group Expectations Survey" (see, Handout No. 1). These 24 questions when organized together are especially useful for team building after the clients share the attitudes that they should be candid and direct with one another, but act during discussions as though they have not actually changed their former in school interpersonal behaviors.

You will note that the six questions under each of the categories A, B, C, and D are summarized on pages 3-8 by a solid line for A questions, dashes for B, asterisks for C; and dots for D. The solid lines and asterisks depict how the individual thinks others will behave; the dashes and dots indicate how the individual views himself behaving in relation to other staff members. Generally, these responses indicate (and this is typical) that although the individual team member is quite willing to be open, direct, and to receive feedback, he believes that others on his team are less willing to do these things in comparison to himself. Such a graphic illustration of what sociologists refer to as "pluralistic ignorance" fits in with a team-building design very well, and inevitably stimulates meaningful, problem-solving discussions among the teams.

3. A third time when survey feedback can be usefully and

naturally employed is after the first major training event but prior to the initial follow-up training event. In a large junior high in which we intervened several years ago, we interviewed all staff members using an opening that sounded as follows:

> "We're holding this interview as part of the preparation for the training session in a few weeks. We would like you to discuss any issues or problems in your school that might profitably be worked on during those sessions."
>
> "Let's brainstorm for the time being. Let's just let our minds wander; let's just say anything that comes into awareness that might constitute a problem at your school. Remember, a problem can be defined as falling short of ideals. It doesn't necessarily have to be a very negative or painful situation, but it might be. Let's begin."

Naturally, these interviews generated useful data about what the staff members viewed as problems. Their statements overlapped considerably, but after classifying them we had 17 issues which summarized reasonably well the longer list. These seventeen problems in turn fell into 5 major categories to organize the feedback: communication, role overload, role clarity, meeting effectiveness, and some miscellaneous issues. Next, we made another visit to the staff to ask staff members to check our summary. We urged the staff to add other issues after the feedback session; none was added. Later we used these data and the reactions at the feedback session to design the first follow-up training session.

4. Another time for formal survey feedback is when the consultant is doing process coaching with an organizational subsystem during one of its regular work sessions. The consultant might serve as the sole observer or he might enlist several organizational members to observe

in the fashion of a fishbowl arrangement. In either case, equipping the observers with simple observation categories to formalize and legitimize the survey feedback can have powerful effects on the trainees. The observation categories can be as simple and direct as the verbal contributions each participant made, over to as complex as having the observers take subjective notes on such difficult questions as: Did all members participate in the decisions that were made? If not, which ones did not? Were the members listening to one another? If not, when did they seem not to be listening? Were there any disagreements between any of the group members? If so, how were the disagreements handled? Were they ignored? Were they smoothed over? Were they recognized and discussed?, etc.

5. Finally, survey feedback can be employed usefully even after the OD consultant has completed his work with the organization. The consultant can facilitate the perpetuation of data feedback by teaching organizational participants how to use simple questionnaires. One example of a very simple and effective procedure was tried by one of our graduate students as part of her dissertation (Nelson, 1972). She helped teachers to become much more tuned into their students' thoughts and feelings by collecting responses from the students on questions such as those shown in Handout 2 and in turn feeding back the results to the teachers by phone later the same day. This questionnaire was adapted from one in a book entitled, Diagnosing Classroom Learning Environments by Fox, Luszki, and me (1966). Changes in the teachers' classroom behaviors were dramatic, considering the simple nature of the procedure. Similar proce-

dures can of course easily be devised for use by organizational participants to maintain norms of openness and directness previously developed during the OD intervention.

Summary

A meta-goal of organization development is to help participants establish appreciation and skill for using objective data about themselves. The prominent method for soliciting and sharing such data has been survey feedback. The OD consultant should have at least three skills to use survey feedback effectively. First, he should be adept at collecting relevant, valid data and at putting the data into a form for feedback that is understandable and energizing to the participants. Second, he should be able to raise the mundane data to a level of larger, essential significance, making the data worthy of notice by the participants. Third, the consultant should find ways of incorporating survey feedback into the natural ebb and flow of OD training. This paper has discussed each of the three capabilities in some detail; further, it has illustrated ways in which questionnaires, interviews, and observations can be employed at five stages of OD training. By these five examples, I have attempted to show how survey feedback can take its place as an integral and natural part of a larger macrodesign for organization development in schools.

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Handout 1

Group Expectation Survey

DIRECTIONS: Before each of the items below put a number from the following rating scale that best expresses your opinion at this time.

Rating Scale

5 = any member of this group
4 = any except one or two members of this group
3 = a slight majority of the members of this group
- -
2 = slightly less than half of the members of this group
1 = one or two members of this group
0 = none of this group

A. Others' Candidness; Solid Line in Graphs

HOW MANY MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP DO YOU EXPECT WILL CANDIDLY REPORT THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION DURING FUTURE GROUP SESSIONS?

____ 1. When he does not understand something you said?
____ 2. When he likes something you said or did?
____ 3. When he disagrees with something you said?
____ 4. When he thinks you have changed the subject or become irrelevant?
____ 5. When he feels impatient or irritated with something you said of did?
____ 6. When he feels hurt -- rejected, embarrassed, or put down -- by something you said or did?

B. Your Candidness; Dashes in Graphs

WITH RESPECT TO HOM MANY MEMBERS WILL YOU CANDIDLY REPORT THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION DURING FUTURE GROUP SESSIONS?

____ 7. When you do not understand something he said?
____ 8. When you like something he said or did?
____ 9. When you disagree with something he said?
____10. When you think he has changed the subject or become irrelevant?
____11. When you feel impatient or irritated with something he said or did?
____12. When you feel hurt -- rejected, embarrassed, or put down -- by something he said or did?

C. Others' Interest in Directness; Asterisks in Graphs

IN YOUR OPINION, HOW MANY IN THIS GROUP ARE INTERESTED IN KNOWING....

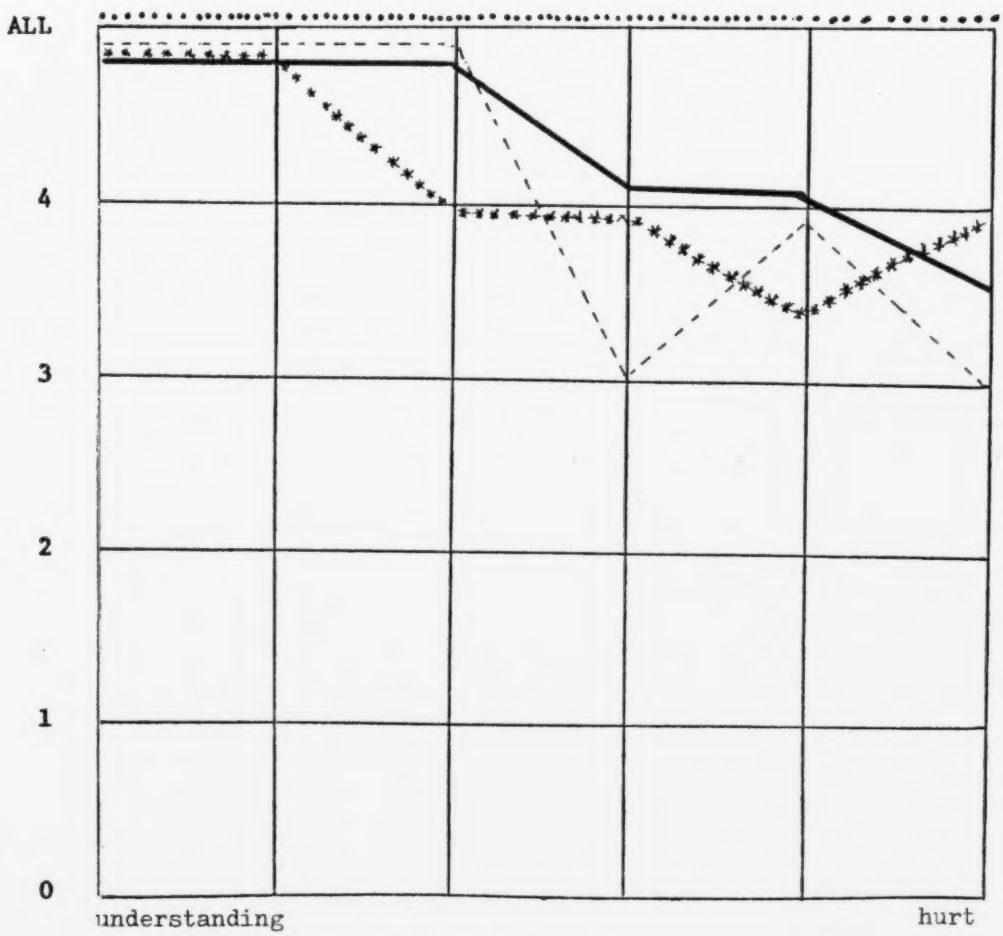
____13. When you do not understand something he said?
____14. When you like something he said or did?
____15. When you disagree with something he said?
____16. When you think he has changed the subject or become irrelevant?
____17. When you feel impatient or irritated with something he said or did?
____18. When you feel hurt -- rejected, embarrassed, or put down -- by something he said or did?

D. Your Interest in Directness; Dots in Graphs

____19. When he does not understand something you said?
____20. When he likes something you said or did?
____21. When he disagrees with something you said?
____22. When he thinks you have changed the subject or become irrelevant?
____23. When he feels impatient or irritated with something you said or did?
____24. When he feels hurt -- rejected, embarrassed, or put down -- by something you said or did?

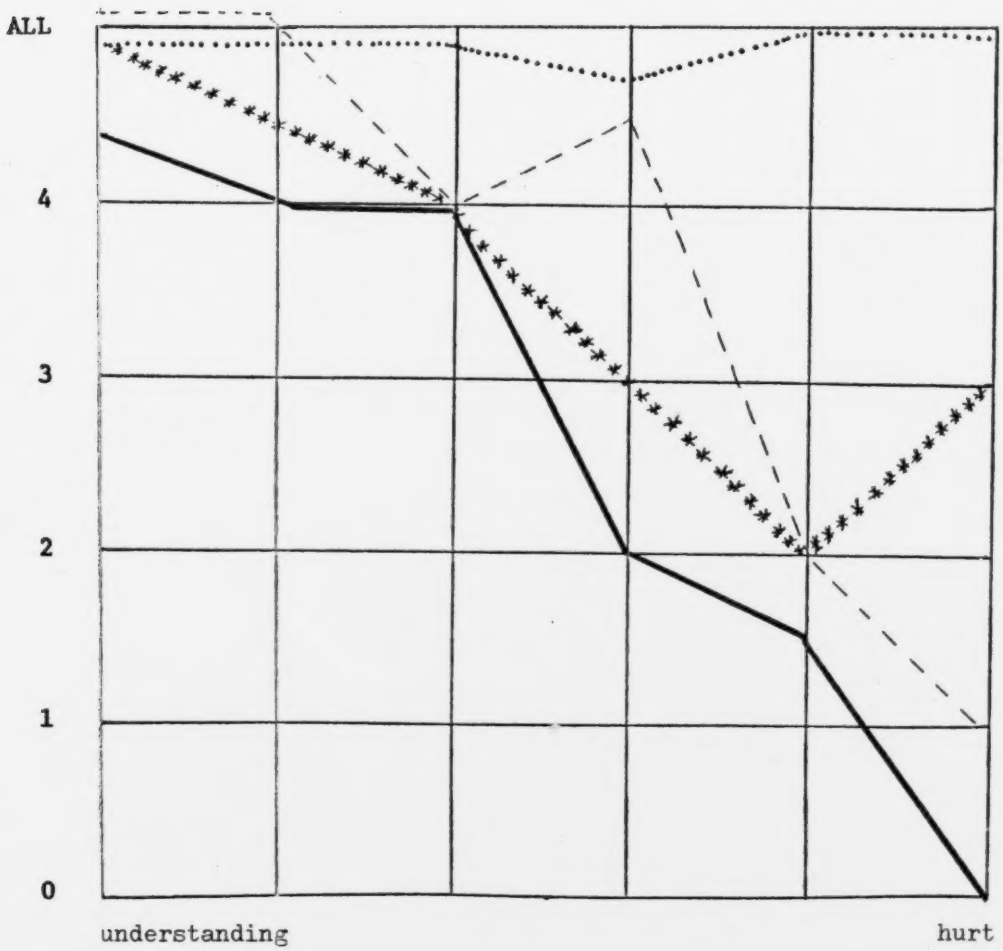
Elementary School #1

1-2 Team



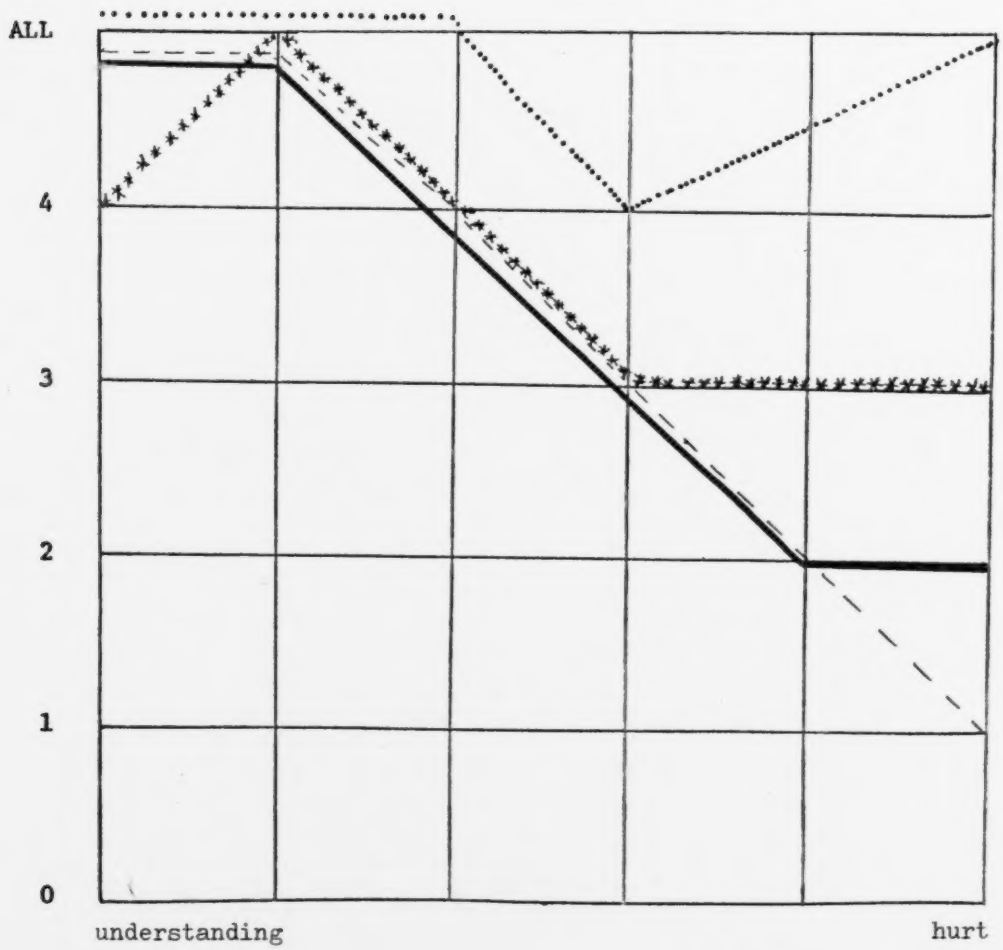
Elementary School #1

3-4 Team



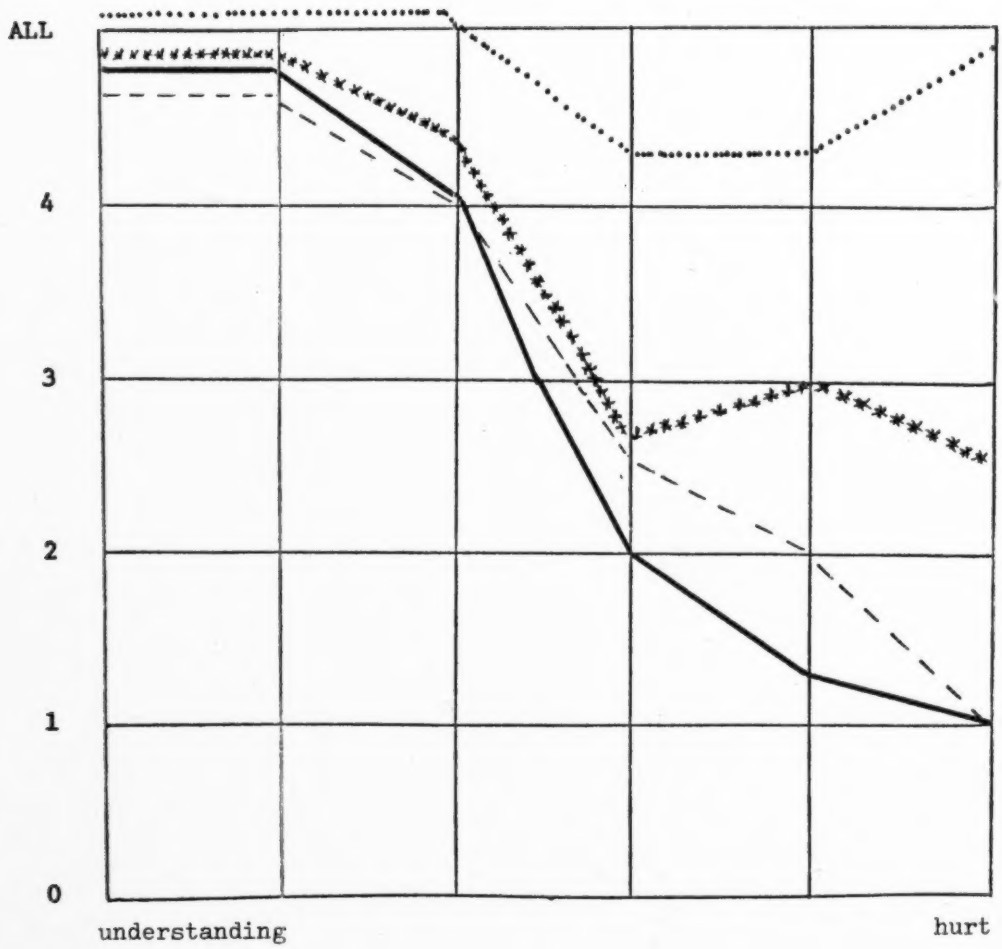
Elementary School #1

5-6 Team



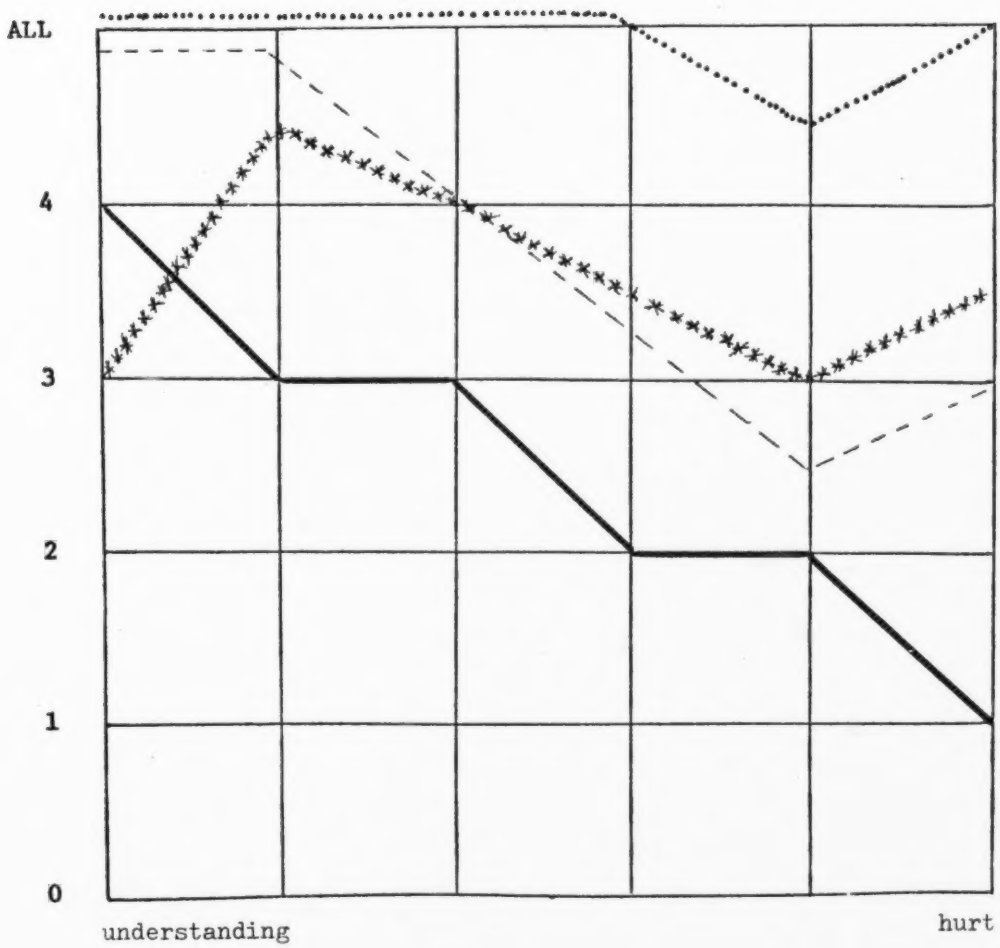
Elementary School #2

1-2 Team



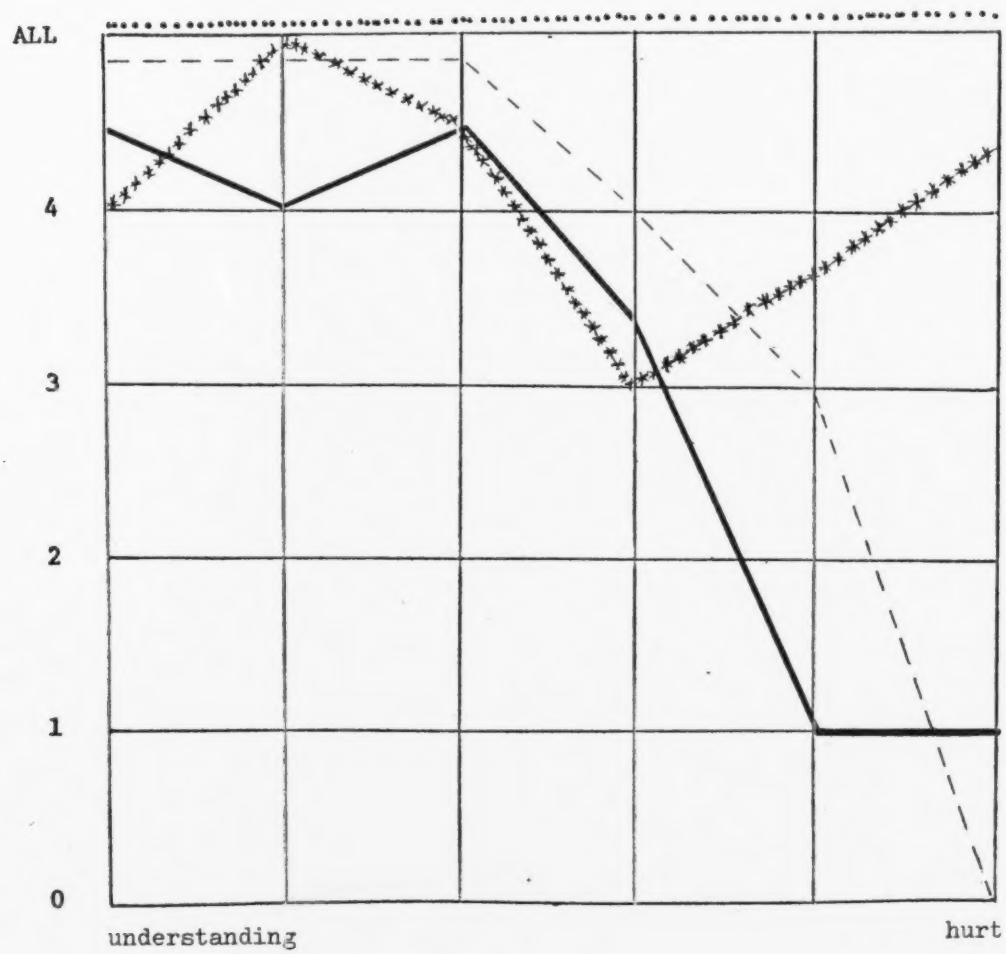
Elementary School #2

3-4 Team



Elementary School #2

5-6 Team



Handout 2

My Teacher

Pretend that you could have your teacher change in some way. For each number, check the box that best tells how you would like your teacher to act in this class. There are no right or wrong answers.

	Much more than now	A little more than now	The same as now	A little less than now	Much less than now
1. Help with work					
2. Yell at us					
3. Make Sure work is done					
4. Ask us to decide how we will work					
5. Smile and be nice					
6. Make us behave					
7. Trust us on our own					
8. Make us work hard					
9. Show understanding for our feelings					